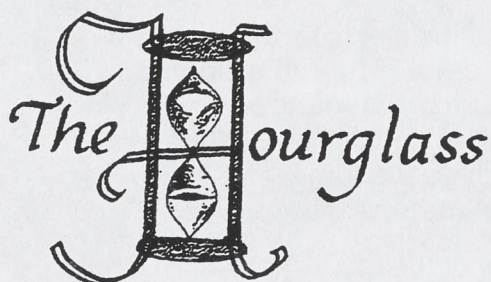


# Historical Society of Palm Desert

P.O. Box 77

Palm Desert, CA 92261

(760) 346-6588



Community

Service

Collections

Archives

FALL/WINTER 1999

VOL. 7, NO. 3

## THIS IS HOW IT ALL BEGAN John & Velma Dawson made Coachella Valley into a Golf Destination in the 1950s

President Dan Callahan welcomed members and guests to the Desert Falls Country Club luncheon on October 27. In his remarks, he spoke of the fine day and the scenic setting .... we are so fortunate! And aren't we glad the City followed up on Councilman Kelly's inspiration to line El Paseo with American Flags? It stirs our patriotic fervor.

After the Pledge of Allegiance, led by Dick Folkers, everyone enjoyed the prime rib meal prepared by the club's chef. Later, Pres. Dan thanked Mary Safe for the excellent arrangements and for the delicious menu. Mary introduced Velma Dawson who is active in the community. She was a founding member of the College of the Desert Foundation, and the Velma Dawson house on campus is named in her honor.

Velma was the speaker of the day and an utterly charming one .... natural, knowledgeable, easy to hear and captivating! Society members felt treated to the finest in oral history.



Velma was married to Johnny Dawson, one of the nation's top amateur golfers. Together they made a dynamic team. Her behind-the-scenes account of their search for property, finding acreage large enough, strategically located and suitable for development was a story all by itself.

Thunderbird Country Club was the first, others followed, including Eldorado, Seven Lakes and Marrakesh. Along the way they met with many obstacles, like reluctant property owners, garbage dumps and outraged locals who felt that no way could the area support two golf courses. Eventually, all these problems were resolved.

99  
Fall/Winter

00-00-511  
HSPD - PUBLICATIONS - NEWSLETTERS

file cy✓



(continued from page 1)

There was a strong spirit of community, like "family" Velma said. The fellowship and camaraderie, which surrounded the game of golf, united celebrities and other desert residents. Figures like Bing Crosby, Bob Hope and other famous names were part of the daily scene.

When the Dawsons were contemplating the project which became Marrakesh on Portola Avenue in Palm Desert, Cliff Henderson paid a visit. He was intensely interested and supportive of what was happening. Recalling his W.W. II service in Morocco, the arid climate, the mountains and the crystalline atmosphere -- he drew a parallel. The similarity of that land he had come to love to the physical characteristics of the Coachella Valley prompted him to give architectural suggestions and even to offer a name. "Why not call it Marrakesh?" he asked. The Dawsons were happy to comply.

Velma's anecdotes recreated the magic. She was generous with the time for a Question and Answer period, which flowed easily from her talk, and made the audience feel included. Indeed, a good number of those present were here in the fifties, and the exchange reflected fond nostalgia for the era.

After this delightful stroll down memory lane, Velma capped the afternoon by strolling among the diners with Howdy Doody. An accomplished puppeteer in her own right, Velma is the creator "mother" of this famous little cowboy puppet. She told us that Howdy Doody, ".....was, is and forever will be ten years old." Sweet age of innocence! Velma and her small side-kick continue to work for the students at C.O.D., and Howdy Doody remains a beloved figure. He may be seen in a current Jim Carry movie "Man on the Moon", due to open on Christmas Day.



Thanks, Velma, for sharing. It was wonderful and you are wonderful. You have added immeasurably to the Society's reputation for presenting authentic glimpses of history.

Members introduced their guests:

<u>member</u>		<u>guest</u>
Jean Ernst	.....	Lucy Shauer
Helene Harrison	.....	Sadie Henry
Del Sharbutt	.....	Roxene Riley
Loretta Riley	.....	Virginia Stevens
Del Davitt	.....	Daisy Dugger
Sleepy Bierman	.....	Georgette Davis

**\* DUES \* DUES \* DUES \* DUES \* DUES \***

**YOUR DUES ARE DUE NOW**

Categories:	Individual	\$ 15.00
	Family	\$ 20.00
	Contributing	\$ 100.00
	Patron	\$ 250.00
	Business	\$ 75.00
	Bus. renewal	\$ 50.00
	Life	\$1000.00

Send your check today -- your membership keeps us vital! THANKS



### Volunteer of the Year

An important part of the luncheon business was presentation of a handsome plaque to Society vice-president, Roger Keezer. Jean Hollenbeck did the honors. She recounted highlights of Roger's long record of service. His name appears on the wall of the Larson Justice Center in Indio as one of last year's volunteers, recognized by the Regional Access Project Foundation. Roger is a member of the Desert Sheriff's Search & Rescue team and the Coachella Valley Hiking Club.

For the Society, he is keeper and driver of Fire Engine #1, Mini-Muster worker, official photographer, organizer of the historic photo collection..... Pres. Dan has characterized Roger as "always there, efficient, helpful."

Roger and his wife, Maria, recently completed a rim-to-rim-to-rim hike of the Grand Canyon in celebration of his 70th birthday. With a mini-celebration of ice cream Drumsticks, the Society board feted Roger for this double accomplishment.

The thing that endears Roger to his co-workers is his modesty. He accomplishes quietly and without fanfare -- but the job gets done! THANKS, Rog'.

### Chamber Mixer

On Wednesday, January 19, the Society will host this event from 5:30-7:30 p.m. at the Old Fire Station on El Paseo. Doloris Driskel is the chairperson; she is also Mrs. Santa in the Golf Cart Parade and represents the H.S. in the City's art program.

### El Paseo Sculpture Exhibition 2000

In the Art Walk on the evening of Nov. 13, the Society's "Tug-of-War" bronze is #19. Stop by the old fire station and have a better look at this masterpiece. Our landscaping done by the city is beautiful too; it won a second year certificate from Desert Beautiful.

### Welcome to New Members

Donald & Jane Cameron, contributing  
Carl W. A. Prout  
Virginia Stevens  
Mr. & Mrs. Anthony Kohlenberger

### Name Badges

Metallic finish name badges are available to the membership. Please print your name as you wish it to appear and send it with \$5.00 to: Historical Society of Palm Desert, P. O. Box 77, Palm Desert, CA 92261-0077.



Seven successful years .... more than 3000 third graders have benefitted from this fire safety program. Planning begins in the summer; by September everything is in place for field activities and the art contest.

Thanks to B.J. and Dan Callahan, Jan Holmlund, Desert Sands Unified School District, Riverside County Fire Dept., Cal. Dept. of Forestry & Fire Protection, parents, media, participating merchants, Bonnie Bowie, Jeanne Ahrens, Mary Noble, Ed & Adele Ruxton, Roger Keezer and Bruce Hagerman ..... the children have FUN and LEARN. Some even wish they could do third grade over again.

Winners in the art contest and program participants are recognized by the Palm Desert and Indian Wells City Councils. As one headline reads, "Children Soak Up Fire Safety in Mini-Muster."



### ROBERT D. WILMETH, JR.

Bob is currently the Treasurer on the Board of the Historical Society of Palm Desert. Though he was born in Phoenix, Arizona on January 2, 1963, he has been a Californian since childhood. He has a brother five years older and a sister two years his junior. She also lives here in the Coachella Valley with her husband and daughter.

When Bob was 13, his father told him the profession of Certified Public Accountant would be an honorable one for him. As Bob says, "In my world, Father knew best; so I never thought of doing anything else. I joined the Palm Desert CPA firm of Krieger Accountancy (now Abel, Krieger and Wilmeth) in December of 1987 and became a partner in 1990."

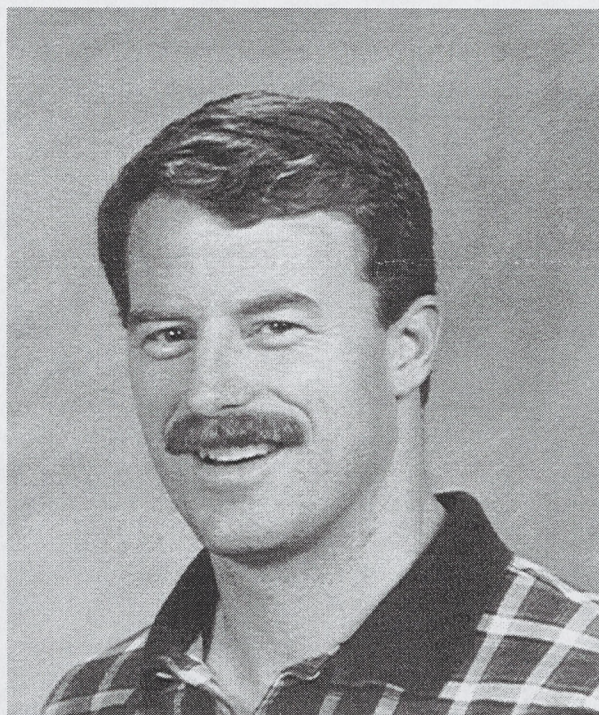
Earlier, in 1986, Bob had married Dorothy McBride in her home town of San Luis Obispo. They met while both were students at University of California, Santa Barbara, and both were working at Carl's Jr. as assistant managers. Bob holds a Bachelor's degree in Business Economics from UCSB. Bob and "Dottie" moved to Coachella Valley in 1987 and now have three small children, ages 8, 7 and 2, who keep them active and well motivated.

Bob supplies the following information about his parents. Both were born in Illinois - his dad in Pontiac and his mom in Magnolia. His love and respect for his parents shines from this brief account, in Bob's own words:

Father: The youngest of six children, Dad came out west after serving in the army during the Korean War. He started out as a chemical salesman, but decided he wanted his own dry cleaning plant. He relocated to Cathedral City in 1970 and bought his first dry cleaning establishment. He had prestigious clients like Frank Sinatra, Alice Faye, Red Skelton and Marvin Davis.

At one time he had as many as five plants in the valley, and currently owns Marshall's Cleaners in Indio. Past president and incoming president of the Cathedral City and Indian Wells Rotary Clubs, he was voted Rotarian of the Year in 1985 due to his efforts to personally transport first aid supplies to victims of the Guatemalan earthquake (using his small plane.)

Mother: Married my Dad in 1957 and divorced him in 1969. She started a career in journalism with no education in that field. As a child I remember my Mom complaining about the football games my Dad and I used to watch. Ironically, she later became the first female sports writer assigned to an NFL team on a full time basis (yes, that included the locker room interviews!) She also covered auto racing and professional golf. After covering the L.A. Rams from 1984 to 1986 for the San Bernardino Sun, she was diagnosed with cancer and had to give up that assignment. Through the grace of God she outlived her prognosis by seven years.





(Wilmeth - continued)

Four years ago Bob, who had been flying with his father since he was three years old, became a pilot. Dottie followed suit soon afterward. Now they are co-pilots on family cross country trips.

Skiing is a favorite hobby, but Bob laments that ski seasons and tax seasons coincide. "So far the taxes have won," he says. He enjoys being involved with the children's activities (baseball, soccer, football, etc.) and has continued his own weight training program since age 14.

Bob and Dottie attended Palm Desert Community Presbyterian Church as visitors for a number of years before becoming members in 1992. Bob currently serves as a Deacon and has taught Sunday School for four years. For the past five years Bob and Dottie have participated in and sometimes led church sponsored couple's bible studies. Also, he says, they have derived great benefit from on-going separate studies.

The Wilmeths try to attend family camp at Forest Home on an annual basis. Longer plane trips are made to other fun places as time and finances permit.

For anyone who thinks they have a full life, this young family's commitment generates pride and inspiration!

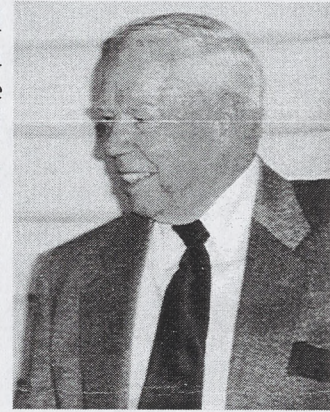
#### **Membership Chair Named**

Florence Maxwell tended the roster faithfully for many years. When she moved to Roseville last spring, her good friend agreed to take the position. Unfortunately, Marian Miller has been forced to resign due to ill health.

We are happy to welcome Barbara Eastes as Membership Chairman. Continuity is wonderful! Barbara's parents, Bob and Gert Keedy, served the Society for many years.

#### **1999 RECAP & BEYOND President Dan Callahan**

"I have enjoyed working with you and appreciate your interest and contributions. Thank you for the cooperation of the Board and my fellow officers."



Many hours have been expended on the archives, budget, 25th anniversary open house, luncheons, newsletter, Founder's Day, Fire Engine #1, exhibits and Mini-Muster.

As we look ahead, we want to further develop the Oral History program, upgrade the interior of the building and the shed in back, and work on a preservation program for sites and buildings.

Bonnie Bowie has been busy with a membership roster, a tri-fold brochure, and is organizing a docent program. Limited space precludes our Society from having museum capabilities; however, we do have fascinating materials, memorabilia and photos which benefit from interpretation. We need volunteer docents, so please call 346-5688 and let us know you will give us some help with this program. The pleasant voice that answers the phone these days is Wanda Steptoe, our new office manager.

#### **Donated Gifts**

Photos & historical document - late 40's = P.S.H.S./Sally McManus, director  
Photo & historical writing = C.V. Museum & Cultural Society/Art LaLonde, Dorothy Schmid, Geri Robertson  
Maps (one dated 1917), Booklets, Photos = C.V. Water District/Ann Copeland



### IN MEMORIAM

John Macy      Burwell J. Harrison

#### **News Notes From All Over**

B. J. Callahan sends a big "THANK YOU" to members of the Society who took the time to attend the Mini-Muster awards ceremonies at Palm Desert and Indian Wells city council meetings.

Ginny Mullins is making a good recovery from foot surgery. She is driving and is working again. We missed you, Ginny!

Florence Maxwell is very happy living directly behind her daughter, Annette, in Roseville. Once a student in Palm Desert, Annette is now a school principal and supervises 31 teachers and custodial staff.

Bill and Hazel O'Neil of Canyon Lake returned to the desert to celebrate their 53rd anniversary at The Mikado at Marriott Desert Springs. Also, the family enjoyed a reunion at Embassy Suites.

Jan Wilgers, daughter of the late Ole Nordland (newspaperman, editor, and Sec. of C.V. Water District), has taught art at Palm Desert High School for 12 years.

**We need a donation: Frank Bogert's book Palm Springs: The First Hundred Years.**

COD Fine Arts Division Chairwoman, Darlene Romano, has taken over as creative producer of the proposed musical pageant on the history of Coachella Valley. She is seeking historical anecdotes.

Theresa Pawley, daughter of the late Dr. Ralph Pawley, is documenting Spanish and Adobe architecture of Coachella Valley residences dating from the 1920s, 30s and 40s. She is working with the valley's Historical Societies to compile 600-700 archival photos. With architects from Mexico, she is working on development of the San Felipe Beach Club. She has interviewed Don and Margie Hutton, owners of the original Cavanaugh house on Cook Street. Of Society participation she says, "Much appreciation to Dan Callahan for his valued assistance in Indian Wells and Palm Desert. I treasure both the photographs and the stories."

Charter member Eunice Pearson suggested the name of an old timer who would be a good interview. She and Rheo Lawman are neighbors; what memories these two pioneer ladies must share!

A very grateful Happy Holidays to all. See you in 2000!

Theda Lundquist,  
"Hourglass Editor"

Historical Society of Palm Desert  
P. O. Box 77  
Palm Desert, CA 92261